



★ UNITED STATES CAPITOL HISTORICAL SOCIETY ★

2012 MAKING DEMOCRACY WORK STUDENT ESSAY CONTEST Presented by the United States Capitol Historical Society

ESSAY TOPIC: The Role of Informed Citizenship in Making Democracy Work

"Knowledge will forever govern ignorance, and a people who mean to be their own Governors must arm themselves with the power knowledge gives." President James Madison, 1822 (James Madison to W. T. Barry 4 Aug. 1822)

"While a constitution may set forth rights and liberties, only the citizens can maintain and guarantee those freedoms. Active and informed citizenship is not just a right; it is a duty." President Ronald Reagan, Proclamation 4858 - Citizenship Day and Constitution Week, 1981 September 16, 1981

Public opinion polls show that a majority of Americans lack confidence in their elected officials in Congress and disapprove of the direction of the country. Yet a large percentage of citizens fail to vote or participate in the political process. If the American experiment in self-government is to succeed, it must have the active participation of its citizens. Can democracy work?—Both James Madison and Ronald Reagan argued that it could, but only with the active participation of “informed” citizens equipped “with the power knowledge gives.”

In an essay, examine the role of informed citizens in making the American system of representative self-government work. Consider the constitutional structure of the government and the role of the individual citizen. Some things to consider might include: What do citizens need to know about how government works and how can they learn more? How can the individual be involved in the political process? What difference can the individual make? How can you share your views with others and make your opinions known to elected officials? In your essay you must use and cite sources such as the U.S. Constitution, newspaper and magazine articles, and books. You may use web sites, but exercise care and seek the guidance of a teacher or an adult.

ELIGIBILITY

The contest is open to students in two categories. The junior division is open to middle school students in grades 6, 7, and 8. The senior category is open to students in grades 9, 10, 11, and 12.

LENGTH

Junior Division: 600 (minimum) to 800 (maximum) words*

Senior Division: 800 (minimum) to 1,200 (maximum) words*

*(Word count does not include the citations to sources consulted.)

DUE DATE

June 15, 2012. All submissions must be postmarked or electronically submitted by Friday, June 15, 2012.

JUDGING CRITERIA

Entries will be judged on the depth of their content, the mastery of the topic, and the skill with which they are written. Students should develop a point of view on the issue and demonstrate critical thinking, using appropriate examples, reasons and other evidence to support their position. Essays should be free of grammatical errors and should be clear, concise and well-organized.

PRIZES

The prizes for the top three entries in **each** division are:

First Place – \$1,000 & trip to Washington, D.C.*

Second Place – \$500

Third Place – \$100

Honorable Mention—The top 50 entries in each division will receive a copy of the book *Understanding Congress* by former Congressman Lee Hamilton.

* Trip includes actual airfare costs to D.C. up to a predetermined amount and one night of lodging for the contest winner and two accompanying parents/guardians or teacher to present the winning essay at the annual meeting of the U.S. Capitol Historical Society.

Winners will be announced by September 31, 2012. The first place winner will be recognized at the annual meeting of the U.S. Capitol Historical Society in Washington, D.C., in fall 2012. All entrants will hear from the U.S. Capitol Historical Society by e-mail or U.S. mail after the winners are selected.

In addition, a **CLASSROOM GRANT** of \$1,000 plus a selection of teaching materials will be presented to the school of the first place winner in each division.

REQUIREMENTS

1. Submitted essays should be in 12-point type, doublespaced and with 1-inch page margins.

2. Essays must have a title, and they must be within the word limit for each division: Junior Division (grades 6, 7, and 8) 600 to 800 words; Senior Division (grades 9, 10, 11, 12) 800-1,200 words. To ensure fairness, do not put your name, address, school or any other identifying information on the essay itself.
3. Sources *must* be used and *must* be cited and credited in a bibliography, consistent with an accepted citation style. For citation and bibliography style, please consult either the *MLA (Modern Language Association) Style Guide* (http://www.mla.org/style_faq1) or Kate L. Turabian, *Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (http://www.press.uchicago.edu/books/turabian/turabian_citationguide.html).
4. All fields on the registration form must be completed.
5. Each submitted essay must also include an essay adviser form (see below), signed to verify the essay is the original work of the student.
6. The essay, registration form, and essay adviser form may be submitted by mail or by email. Entries submitted by postal mail must be mailed to the following address, postmarked no later than June 15, 2012:

2012 Making Democracy Work Essay Contest
U.S. Capitol Historical Society
200 Maryland Avenue, N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002

Entries submitted electronically as MSWord or Adobe Acrobat PDF files should be emailed by June 15, 2012 to: uschs@uschs.org. The signed essay adviser form may be scanned and submitted electronically, but you must retain the original signed copy.

ESSAY ADVISER INFORMATION

Students must have an “essay adviser” to review the essay. Advisers must be a teacher or counselor at the applicant’s school. The adviser cannot be the student’s parent unless the parent homeschools the student. The adviser verifies the essay is the student’s original work and reviews it to ensure it meets all requirements. An adviser may work with more than one student, but each submitted essay must have its own adviser form.

[Download Registration Form \(pdf file\)](#)

[Download Essay Adviser Form \(pdf file\)](#)

The 2012 Making Democracy Work Student Essay Contest is made possible by a grant from Amway Corporation